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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the extent to which American undergraduate students find problems adjusting to study in Israeli colleges, universities, and yeshivot with respect to the Hebrew language, academic matters, personal situations, and living arrangements. The study asked 671 undergraduate American students studying in Israel how difficult it was for them to make 53 specific school-related adjustments. It was found that, among the four problem areas considered, living arrangements posed the most serious and most frequent adjustment difficulties. The other areas, in descending order of seriousness, were the Hebrew language, academic matters, and personal situations. Living arrangement problems included lack of phone facilities (the most serious adjustment difficulty reported), lack of adequate facilities to prepare food, mobility problems on the Sabbath, problems concerning laundry facilities, and lack of privacy. Writing term papers and speaking Hebrew were the most serious difficulties in using the language; secretarial services and finding academic resources were among the academic problems frequently mentioned; and relating to Israeli students was the most formidable personal adjustment problem. The paper recommends that high school advisors in America and counselors of students planning to go to Israel for postgraduate study provide an orientation program addressing these problems and helping students develop strategies for dealing with them. Contains a 16-item bibliography. (GLR)

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ADJUSTMENT DIFFICULTIES OF AMERICAN STUDENTS IN ISRAELI INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The adjustment difficulties experienced by Americans who were studying in Israeli colleges, universities and yeshivot are identified. Implications for the orientation of such potential students are suggested.

Many Jews from countries throughout the world and particularly the United States study in the State of Israel. Hochstein (1986) estimated that about 15,000 foreigners were students in Israeli colleges, universities and yeshivot and other formal educational programs in 1985. Of these, approximately one half were students from the United States. The number of American Jewish youth who pursue higher education in Israel is likely to grow in the future in that there is a growing feeling in the Jewish community in the United States that study in Israel should become an integral part of the education of American Jewish young people. Such experience would work toward fulfillment of the vision of the early twentieth century Jewish scholar Asher Ginsburg that Israel should be the "national spiritual center" of the Jewish people. Too, there is general agreement among international educators that more American students should spend some of their college years studying in a foreign country and in particular outside an Anglo-European setting (Council on International Exchange, 1981).

While American students abroad share certain similarities with students from other countries, they are different in many important respects. For example, students from non-American countries study abroad to bring back new technology to their countries. In contrast, Americans go abroad largely for enrichment and to find a sense of purpose (Jenkins, et al, 1983).

In the context of this study, an important difference between American students in Israel and American students in other countries is that most who study in Israel are Jews (Ben Haim, 27 May 1991). They bring a prior emotional attachment to the host country, not usually found among other students sojourning in foreign lands. Because of the historical relationship which exists between the State of Israel and Jews everywhere, many of the visiting Jewish students do not see the State of Israel as foreign, nor themselves as foreigners in it. They expect to feel "at home" in what is considered a Jewish spiritual center and by some also a Jewish homeland. Herman (1970) referred to this, and several directors of various programs for foreign students in Israel confirmed it in personal interviews with the researchers (Cohen 1986; Horowitz 1986; Roe 1986, Pines 1986). This expectation would lead one to believe that American students in Israeli higher education would experience less adjustment difficulty than American students in other countries.

PROBLEM

The study reported herein was developed to determine the extent to which American students in Israeli colleges, universities and yeshivot experience adjustment difficulties in certain problem areas, as defined through the Study Abroad Adjustment Inventory, and to interpret the findings for their meaning to directors of foreign student programs in Israeli

colleges and universities and to advisors in the U.S. of American students planning to study abroad.

The following research question was addressed in the study:

To what extent do American students studying at Israeli colleges/universities and yeshivot experience adjustment difficulties related to:

(1) the Hebrew language, (such as understanding teachers, taking exams in Hebrew, and communicating with Israelis)
(2) academic matters, (such as understanding school procedures, grading systems, and obtaining personal advice)
(3) personal situations (such as finances, relationships, and depression) and
(4) living arrangements, (such as privacy in living quarters, banking facilities, and adjustment to food, climate and social customs)

METHOD

In November and December of 1989, 671 American undergraduates in Israeli institutions were surveyed to determine how difficult it was for them to make fifty-three specific school-related adjustments. The contact with the students was

made through personal visits done by one of the researchers to twenty Israeli colleges, universities and yeshivot wherein American students were enrolled. Each participant completed the Study Abroad Adjustment Inventory (SAAI) and the Personal Data Sheet (PDS) instruments created, validated and tested for reliability by the writer specifically for this research. The SAAI categorized the adjustment difficulties into four general areas: Hebrew language, academic matters, personal situations, and living arrangements. It utilized four extent-of-difficulty response alternatives: 1.00 = none, 2.00 = not serious, 3.00 = serious, 4.00 = very serious, to assess student difficulty with each adjustment. The PDS elicited several items of demographic information about the students.

Table 1 reports the distribution of study participants by school attended. Of the 671 study participants, 306 were males and 365 females, 292 attended five universities, 16 one college (youth group), and 363 (of whom 189 were men and 174 women) attended fourteen yeshivot, four of which are for women and ten for men. In terms of location of schools, 429 studied in Jerusalem and 242 in other areas throughout Israel. The most southern school they attended is in Beer Sheva, the largest city in the southern part of Israel, the gateway to the Negev (formerly a desert) and the most northern school in Haifa, the first modern port in Israel. Most schools are located in urban and suburban locations, however, three schools are in rural

Table 1.--Distribution of 671 Study Participants by School Attended

School	Location	Type	Males		Females		Total	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Bar Ilan University	Ramat Gan	Univ.	9	2.9	7	1.9	16	2.4
Ben Gurion University	Beer Sheva	Univ.	1	.3	3	0.8	4	0.6
Beth Hedrash Latorah	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	22	7.2	--	--	22	3.3
Haifa University	Haifa	Univ.	11	3.6	40	11.0	51	7.6
Hebrew University	Jerusalem	Univ.	64	20.9	89	24.4	153	22.8
Hachon Gold	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	--	--	40	11.0	40	6.0
Hevasereth Zion	Hevasereth Zion	Yeshiva	7	2.3	--	--	7	1.0
Hichleiat Yerushalaim	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	--	--	41	11.2	41	6.1
Hidrashot Horiah	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	--	--	54	14.8	54	8.0
Hevey Yerushalaim	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	--	--	39	10.7	39	5.8
Ohr Yerushalaim	Beth Hair	Yeshiva	59	19.3	--	--	59	8.8
Tel Aviv University	Tel Aviv	Univ.	22	7.2	46	12.6	68	10.1
Yeshivat Hakotel	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	40	13.1	--	--	40	6.1
Yeshivat Hamivtar	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	15	4.9	--	--	15	2.2
Yeshivat Shalavim	Shalavim	Yeshiva	37	12.1	--	--	37	5.5
Yeshivot (4 schools)	Jerusalem	Yeshiva	9	2.9	--	--	9	1.3
Young Judea	Jerusalem	Youth Group	10	3.3	6	1.6	16	2.4
	TOTAL		306	100.0	365	100.0	671	100.0

areas. The researchers believe that the study sample of American students in Israeli colleges universities and yeshivot was drawn from a good cross section of such institutions and is representative of American students therein.

The study participants were preponderantly in the seventeen to twenty age range. The percentages are 81.7 and 80.8, respectively. More than nine of every ten men (97.4 percent) and women (94.2 percent) were single. A majority of each male and female subjects were graduates of a Jewish day school or yeshiva. The percentages are 61.8 and 52.9, respectively. The others attended public or non-Jewish private schools. Less than five of every ten men (42.2 percent) and women (35.1 percent) studied abroad after completing high school but before starting college. The others completed at least part of their undergraduate education in the United States before going abroad. More than six of every ten men (65.1 percent) and women (60.5 percent) spent less than three months or no time at all in Israel immediately prior to starting their studies in Israel.

Study subjects were limited to those American students who had completed one or more semesters at an Israeli college, university, or yeshiva. A majority of the male (58.2 percent) and female (57.8 percent) subjects were at the end of the first semester. Most of the male (92.1 percent) and female (86.9 percent) respondents were Jews, since most of the international

students in Israel were Jewish. Very few of the Jewish male (3.9 percent) and female (3.6 percent) students were of non Ashkenazic (middle European) descent.

Students' reasons for studying in Israel were varied. However, 20.9 percent of males and 37.3 percent of females reported "broadening my experience" and 35.6 percent of males and 15.1 percent of females reported "studying Judaica" as the primary reason. Students used various financial resources, but about two-thirds of each males (65.8 percent) and females (69.8 percent) reported parents' financing as their primary source of funds.

The respondents had a wide variation in their knowledge of the Hebrew language before starting the program, from no Hebrew language mastery (12.1 percent of males and 10.4 percent of females) to excellence (4.9 percent of males and 6.6 percent of females). Most fell between the extremes. Many attended programs that use English partially or completely in class instruction. Others attend classes conducted entirely in Hebrew.

Results

Table 2 reports the mean rating and the rank order of mean ratings for each problem area based on scores for 671 American students in israeli colleges, universities and yeshivot on the

Table 2.--Mean Rating and Rank Order SAAI Problem Area Scores For 671 American Students in Israeli Colleges, Universities, and Yeshivot

Problem Area	Mean Rating[a]	Rank Order[b]
Living Arrangements	2.872	1
Hebrew Language	1.781	2
Academic Matters	1.691	3
Personal Situations	1.647	4

[a]Mean rating is based on a response continuum of 1.00--none, 2.00--not serious, 3.00--serious, 4.00--very serious.

[b]Rank order of one represents greatest average reported difficulty.

SAAI. It shows that among the four problem areas considered in this research, Hebrew language, academic matters, personal situations, and living arrangements, the last was the one in which the most serious and most frequent adjustment difficulties were reported. The mean rating of the adjustment difficulties for this problem area ($\bar{X}$ = 2.87) was close to "serious" in relative level of seriousness. The mean rating of the seriousness of the difficulties in the other three problem areas was between (1.65-1.78) "not a problem" and "not serious" in the following descending order in seriousness: Hebrew language, academic matters, and personal situations. In these three areas, in general, the seriousness of the adjustment difficulties American students in Israel reported could be considered minor.

The mean rating and rank order of mean SAAI living arrangement Hebrew language, academic matters and personal situations scores for adjustment difficulties for 671 American students studying in Israeli colleges, universities, and yeshivot are reported in Table 3.

In the living arrangement problem area, the mean rating for "phone facilities" was the most serious adjustment difficulty reported by the American students. The other adjustment difficulties (in descending order of seriousness), all of which ranked above "not serious" but below "serious," were: "adequate facilities to prepare food," "getting around on the Sabbath" (for

Table 3.--Mean Rating and Rank Order SAAI Adjustment Difficulty Scores for 671 American Students Studying in Israeli Colleges, Universities, and Yeshivot

Problem Area and Adjustment Difficulty	Mean Rating[a]	Rank Order[b]
Hebrew Language		
writing term papers	2.361	1
communicating with Israelis	2.133	2
feeling embarrassed to speak Hebrew	1.995	3
taking exams in Hebrew	1.968	4
reading text for class	1.919	5
making myself understood in class	1.684	6
understanding the professor in class	1.645	7
taking class notes	1.528	8
Academic Matters		
obtaining secretarial services	2.053	1
finding academic resources	2.043	2
meeting time pressures	1.871	3
obtaining academic advisement	1.729	4
taking exams	1.720	5
having access to faculty for academic discussions	1.630	6
knowing teacher expectations of me	1.584	7
dealing with competitiveness	1.538	8
understanding grading system	1.504	9
understanding school registration procedures	1.451	10

Table 3--Continued

Problem Area and Adjustment Difficulty	Mean Rating[a]	Rank Order[b]
Personal Situations		
relating to Israeli students	2.016	1
being homesick	1.970	2
finding dates	1.934	3
feeling depressed	1.903	4
having adequate financial resources	1.887	5
establishing acquaintances with people other than students	1.851	6
relating to students of non-English speaking countries (other than Israelis)	1.846	7
being lonely	1.735	8
keeping in touch with family/friends in America	1.714	9
relating to faculty members on social level	1.682	10
obtaining personal advisement	1.675	11
having a social life	1.562	12
relating to students to other English-speaking countries	1.317	13
relating to American students	1.286	14
Living Arrangements		
phone facilities	2.960	1
adequate facilities to prepare food	2.458	2
getting around on the Sabbath (if you travel on the Sabbath)	2.231	3
laundry facilities	2.230	4

Table 3.--Continued

Problem Area and Adjustment Difficulty	Mean Rating[a]	Rank Order[b]
Living Arrangements (continued)		
banking facilities	2.149	5
enough space for study in living quarters	2.133	6
privacy in living quarters	2.108	7
living quarters too small	1.928	8
adjusting to food	1.901	9
adequate facilities to buy meals	1.844	10
mailing facilities	1.821	11
too many people in my apartment	1.775	12
having proper furniture	1.761	13
relating to roommates or apartment mates	1.745	14
having proper transportation	1.700	15
adjusting to local social customs and norms	1.664	16
not being invited to Israeli homes	1.578	17.5
adjusting to climate	1.578	17.5
adequate facilities to buy groceries	1.574	19
having the proper Sabbath atmosphere (if so inclined)	1.430	20
living quarters too far from school	1.346	21

[a]Mean rating is based on a response continuum of 1.00--none, 2.00--not serious, 3.00--serious, 4.00--very serious.

[b]Rank order of one represents greatest average reported difficulty.

those who travel on the Sabbath), "laundry facilities," "bank facilities," "enough space for study in living quarters," and "privacy in living quarters." The least serious adjustment difficulty within the living arrangements problem area was "enough space for study in living quarters."

In the Hebrew language problem area, "writing term papers" and "communicating with Israelis" were the two most serious adjustment difficulties. Each was rated between "not serious" and "serious." The least serious adjustment difficulty within the Hebrew language problem area was "taking class notes."

Within the academic matters problem area, the most serious adjustment difficulties reported by the students studied were "secretarial services" and "finding academic resources." Each, however, was cited as "not serious" to "serious" in terms of difficulty. "Understanding school procedures" was the least serious adjustment difficulty in this problem area.

Within the personal situations problem area, "relating to Israeli students" was the most formidable adjustment difficulty. The extent of difficulty assigned to this item was between "not serious" and "serious." This finding, when combined with that for "communicating with Israelis" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.13) in the Hebrew

Language problem area, suggests that cultural factors as well as language competency can come into play in American/Israeli communication. The difficulty of "relating to American students" was considered slightly above "not a problem," and it was the least serious difficulty within the personal situations problem area.

Conclusions

In general the adjustment difficulties faced by the study sample of American undergraduate students in Israel are not serious and are lower in magnitude than adjustment difficulties of international students in America and foreign students in other countries. The reason for this may be the special affinity these students (predominantly Jewish) feel toward Israel, as less than three percent reported not to be Jewish. Also, many reported an intrinsic motivation for study in Israel; only six percent of the study sample reported their reason for study in Israel was obtaining credit while having a good time. The other reasons were to: study Hebrew and Judaica, broaden their experience, experience religious life in Israel, obtain specific educational programs and other Israel- related reasons. It is logical to conclude that such intrinsic motivation may reduce the frustrations of adjustment difficulties experienced by the American students studied.

Although more than a third of the study subjects reported that their Hebrew language mastery before starting to study in Israel is best described as "none" or "poor," the language problem area was rated lower than "not serious." This suggests that a lack of Hebrew language knowledge for English speaking students in Israel is not much of a problem. This may be due to the widespread familiarity with English in Israel. In particular in the academic community, English is practically a second language (after Hebrew), and a primary reading source in many academic disciplines. Many programs exist in Israel that are geared to accommodate English speaking students who have some knowledge of Hebrew or who have no knowledge of Hebrew. Therefore, it is concluded that competency in Hebrew is not an essential skill for a successful adjustment to study in Israeli colleges, universities, and yeshivot.

Implications

It would be useful to American students planning to study in Israeli post-secondary institutions, that an orientation program which addresses the problems students face most and strategies for dealing with serious adjustment difficulties, be conducted by their high school advisors in America and counselors of these students in Israel. These adjustments are likely to be "writing term papers," "communicating with Israelis," "feeling embarrassed to speak Hebrew," "taking exams in Hebrew," "obtaining

secretarial services," "finding academic resources," "relating to Israeli students," "being homesick," "phone facilities," "adequate facilities to prepare food," "getting around on the Sabbath (for those who travel on the Sabbath)," "laundry facilities," "enough space for study in living quarters," "privacy in living quarters," and, in general, a standard of living lower than in the United States.

Further, to facilitate such orientation a guide should be developed which provides information about the unique features of specific Israeli universities and yeshivot so that an appropriate match can be made between student characteristics and goals and the Israeli institutions in which the American students will study. In addition, the guide should discuss adjustment strategies regarding such matters as exams, teacher expectations, grading systems, necessary financial resources, living quarters, food, local social customs and norms, living conditions, and standard of living which is lower than in the U.S.

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